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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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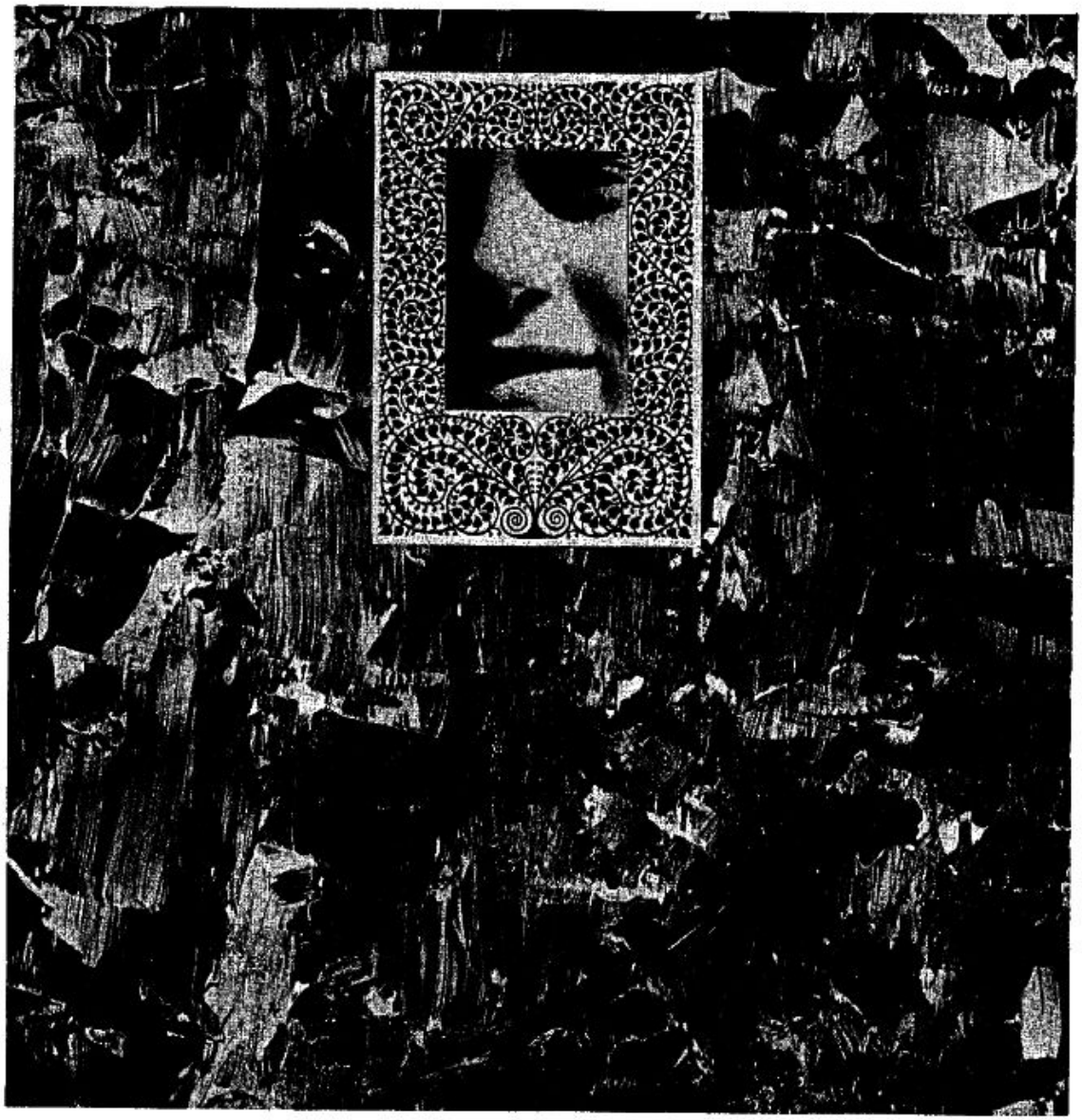

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." — *Matthew 5:8*

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The Word Abused …

THE REBAPTIZED CHURCH OF CHRIST

There is, unfortunately, more than one way to abuse the scriptures. It is done through twisting and warping what is actually said, as we are noticing in this series. It is also done through neglect of the context or through misapplication, which makes scriptures mean what it was never intended to convey, however right or wrong the points may be. Still another way is through underemphasis or overemphasis, which either makes too little or too much of what the scriptures say. One might accept a scriptural truth and give it the right interpretation, but err in a failure to give it proper significance. All scripture may well be true and of course the word of God, but not all truths are equally important. We can abuse the word in failing to recognize this.

Our purpose in this installment, however, is to notice an instance of making *too much* of what is written. Anything can be warped by stretching as well as by shrinking. Any truth can be overworked to the point of distortion. The Pharisees did this with fasting and Sabbath-keeping, and some of the early Christians did this with circumcision and dietary rules. Any external act is vulnerable to this kind of treatment — *both* ways perhaps — with some making too little of it because it *is* external and others making too much of it because it is an ordinance of God.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that many of us in the Churches of Christ have abused the scriptures in this way in reference to baptism. The charge that we preach baptism rather than Jesus may be unfair, but there is some truth to it. We often leave the impression that baptism is *the point* of the gospel, and we have stressed it to the degree that it stands apart from the Cross as an arbitrary command, not unlike the Judaizers did circumcision: We often seem embarrassed by the doctrine of salvation by grace apart from works, so evident in the scriptures, as if there is indeed “a work of righteousness” whereby we are saved.

We have failed to relate baptism to the love and mercy of God, and folk really believe that we are saved only by the grace of God. We have left the impression that baptism is, after all, a work that we do in order to become righteous, thus denying the apostolic insistence that salvation is “not by works of righteousness which we have done ourselves” (Tit. 3:5), and so we have invited those endless debates on baptism that could have been avoided, for the most part, if we had always related baptism to the Cross. In depicting it as the response of faith, or as “the cultivation of grace,” to use Campbell’s expression, rather than as arbitrarily “essential,” the religious world would have been more impressed. Not only have we hammered away at the “something you have to do” bit, but

we have made a big deal out of one's proper understanding of the import of the act. which makes not only the act essential but a certain indoctrination as well.

This abuse of baptism is evident in the widespread practice of reimmersing people who are already immersed believers. This reaches the extremity of rebaptizing our own people in the Churches of Christ! Hordes of our folk are reimmersed because they "want to be sure," or because they think they were too young the first time or didn't understand enough about what they were doing. It is odd to see one immersed allover again after being a Christian for many years, but it is a frequent event in our churches. Oftentimes it is because one wants to make sure that he is baptized for the remission of sins, as if this depended upon him as much as upon God.

This questionable practice hangs heavy upon many churches, underscoring once again the insidious divisions that plague us. Anglicans and Roman Catholics often rebaptize each other, to the agony of their leaders with ecumenical concerns. We are wont to reimmerse all Baptists that come our way, and they, because of the old Landmark controversy, which saw baptism in terms of an authentic succession, will rebaptize the Church of Christ folk that go to them. The Mormons go even further in being repeatedly immersed in behalf of the deceased, due to the interpretation they place upon 1 Cor. 15:29.

Our people often resort to Acts 19, where Paul immerses twelve men who had already been immersed, as grounds for rebaptizing immersed believers, but an examination of the context reveals that this text no more justifies what we do than does 1 Cor. 15:29 justifies what the Mormons practice.

Those disciples at Ephesus *were* reimmersed true enough, but this fact alone hardly allows for the condition that 1 am calling into question, where many of our people get immersed again and again "just to make sure." Those Ephesians were not baptized in the name of Jesus to start with, but rather "into John's baptism." John's baptism had its initiatory or preparatory role, and for this reason we are not to suppose that his disciples had to be reimmersed, that is, *up until Pentecost.* To say that all those John baptized had to be reimmersed later in the name of Christ is to undo the work of the harbinger. For this reason I conclude that on Pentecost all those that John had prepared for the Messiah were initiated into the Body of Christ sort of ex officio and without further baptism.

But after Pentecost it was a different matter. John's baptism no longer had a place in God's order, for it was superseded by Christ's immersion. This was the case with the twelve at Ephesus. Apollos, who "knew only the baptism of John" and who needed to know the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:25-26), had discipled these men, and so Paul found their baptism inadequate. Paul's clue that something was wrong was their reply to his question, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Their reply was that they had not so much as heard of the Holy Spirit. If this were argued as ground for rebaptizing in the Church of Christ today, we might well baptize the whole kit and

caboodle, for we are a people that have virtually ignored the Holy Spirit. Needless to say, our people hardly have had the Spirit in view at baptism. But still I see no ground for reimmersing folk in our time on the basis of Acts 19, unless indeed one were void of faith in Christ at the time of baptism, in which case one would not need any precedent. It would simply be a matter of immersing one for what would *really* be the first time.

Rebaptized people in the primitive churches must have been virtually nonexistent. Apollos' ministry before he was set straight was limited. There is nowhere in scripture the slightest hint of reimmersion on the grounds of "being sure" or "not being satisfied." People were baptized in reference to their faith in Christ, and that was it. It's highly probable that of all the characters in the New Testament and in early church history there is not one, save those twelve at Ephesus, that was baptized a second time. And yet we have in Churches of Christ this fetish for reimmersion, as if it were a major experience in the scriptures and in history. We would surely think it strange to learn that Jesus was baptized a second time, or that many of those on Pentecost went on to be immersed still again later in life "because of doubts," or that the Ethiopian eunuch or the Philippian jailer were afterwards immersed still again.

I am convinced that these second and third immersions among us are not only unnecessary, but that they run the risk of prostituting an act made sacred by God's own decree. It is evident that our *theology* of baptism has become terribly warped, for we have come to see it as something arbitrary and absolute rather than in reference to the Cross. We have so dogmatized the act, rather than treating it as within the framework of grace and mercy, that we have led our people to suppose that this is *the one thing* that they must get right. Our warping has taken such extremes as to insist that one must have a certain education about baptism before the act is valid. One must understand what it *is for* and what it *does,* and this is pounded into our folk year in and year out, so that we have a lot of people that keep on being baptized in order to make sure they have done it right.

If this logic is right, then there is hardly an end to the number of times one will be immersed. Must one understand that he is being baptized into Christ as Ro. 6:3 indicates? And that we are baptized into death as Ro. 6:4 shows? Must we realize that immersion is the answer of a good conscience toward God as 1 Pet. 3:21 says? And that in baptism we put on Christ as in Gal. 3:27? Must we understand "the working of God" in reference to baptism as taught in Col. 2:12, the "washing of regeneration" in Tit. 3:5, the "seasons of refreshing" in Acts 3:19, and the "remission of sins" and "gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2:38?

If it is a matter of *understanding* all the implications and blessings of baptism, then where does one stop? Why say one has to realize it is "for the remission of sins" but does not have to understand that in the act he "receives the gift of the Holy Spirit," which is in the same passage? And how about the other six or eight blessings of baptism? If this

rebaptism doctrine is right, then we should be immersed every time we gain a new insight into baptism. If it is a matter of *knowledge,* as some of our preachers insist, rather than a matter of *faith,* as Jesus taught, then where is the line to be drawn on how much one must know?

Ro. 6:17 is made to mean that one must understand baptism if he correctly obeys, for it reads: "having obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." *From the heart* means understanding, while *form of doctrine* means baptism, according to this view. But this is a very unlikely interpretation, for the context, as well as the verse itself, suggests that obeying *from the heart* refers to a willing response, while *form of doctrine* refers to the mould of Christ-likeness, or righteousness, into which the Romans had been cast by the gospel. That is, their willful, sincere obedience to the gospel moulded them into servants of righteousness rather than sin.

My position is that there is but one condition for baptism, and that is faith in Jesus. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved," says Jesus. It was to *believers* that Peter said "repent and be baptized." No requirements are laid down about knowledge or comprehension. God will take care of all the benefits and blessings, for that is His part, not ours. Even when one supposes that some of the blessings come *before* baptism, the fact remains that he has believed and been immersed. All who do that are my brothers, however well or poorly be their knowledge of the theology of baptism.

We always hear "You can't be taught wrong and be baptized right." which is usually a ploy against the Baptists or somebody. The statement begs the question, for the fact is that one may hear the truth about Jesus from people who are wrong about a lot of things (like us!), and if he goes on to obey Jesus in baptism, he has obeyed the gospel like anyone else. Most all that any of us know we have learned from "people in error," for the simple reason that there aren't any other kind. But "people in error" are also people who have some truth, and if one believes that and is baptized, then he is a Christian — whoever be the "people in error" from whom he learned *that* truth. So, yes, one can be baptized right, if, along with the error, he learned the truth about Jesus.

There is only one baptism (Eph. 4:5), and that is not "Baptist baptism," "Christian Church baptism," or "Church of Christ baptism," or any other kind of sectarian baptism, if indeed there are such baptisms. If one believes in Jesus and is immersed into him, he becomes a member of the Body, and it doesn't matter who baptizes him or where he is baptized. Nor does it matter whether he realizes it is for the remission of sins or whether he knows he receives the Spirit or whether he understands it is the washing of regeneration. Jesus does not talk about the theology of baptism, but simply "He who believes and is baptized …"

What I am saying has been the position of Restoration leaders from the outset. Alexander Campbell was himself immersed by a Baptist, and it was not until his debate with McCalla seven years later that the import of "for the remission of sins" dawned on him. Barton Stone and his fellow Presbyterians immersed each other, and it was not until he met Campbell 20 years later that he related baptism to salvation. Numerous Restoration leaders "came over" from the Baptists, including John T. Johnson, Raccoon John Smith, Jacob Creath and William Hayden, and it never occurred to any of them to be rebaptized. Old church records of those days carry the common entry of "Received from the Baptists …" with the names following, a list always distinguished from those who were received by baptism.

Our Movement was almost a century old before anyone got the idea of reimmersing people already immersed. By reading Steve Eckstein's *History of Churches of Christ in Texas* one will learn of how Austin McGary started the *Firm Foundation* as a kind of "rebaptism faction," for it was the medium through which McGary and others fostered a movement to reimmerse all those who were not baptized "for the remission of sins," meaning of course that the believer had to have an understanding of this before his baptism. David Lipscomb, editor of the *Gospel Advocate,* strongly opposed McGary in his contention, insisting that baptism need have but one antecedent, which is faith in Jesus as the Son of God. This was not only the beginning of Texas Church of Christism, but the origin of a feud that has long prevailed between Tennessee and Texas churches. Reimmersing Baptists became a big deal in Texas, but it was something strictly new to the Restoration Movement.

When McGary and others pressed the point upon Lipscomb that Baptists are baptized because their sins are already remitted, Uncle Dave fired back by saying that surely no one ever has been immersed because his sins are already remitted. True, he may believe his sins are already forgiven at the time of his baptism, Lipscomb conceded, but *that* is not why he is baptized. He is baptized in view of Christ, Uncle Dave observed, because he believes, or for obedience, or because Jesus was; but never for the reason that his sins are remitted. Lipscomb further showed that one can't be baptized for the remission of sins anyway, as if it were by his power. The believer is to obey Jesus in being baptized, leaving it to God to bestow whatever His grace and mercy allow.

But it was Alex Campbell himself who was the most adamant against reirnmersion, and we may conclude that he would not have reimmersed one already immersed even if it were requested of him. He made but one exception. If one were void of faith in Jesus when he was immersed, then he should experience *believer's* baptism, and not just get wet.

He wrote at length on this subject in the 1831 *Millenial Harbinger* (p. 481 f). He explains that if a preacher immerses one .who is already an immersed believer he is burying *a live disciple,* which is against the law! He says, "Indeed, I know not how any

proclaimer of the gospel, how any intelligent disciple, can presume to bury a living disciple; it is against the law! How can he immerse a believer a second time into Christ, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? He must have received a new commission. The old apostolic commission authorizes it not."

Campbell deals with the arguments we still hear these days. Some are reimmersed because they didn't understand it the first time, he recognizes. But neither will they understand it the second or third time, he says. Did those baptized by the apostles understand all about baptism?, he asks. He points to Ro. 6 as a sure indication that they didn't. "Know ye not," says Paul to them, "that as many of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?" He does not instruct them to repeat the act because they didn't know!

Others are reimmersed, Alex notes, for the peace of mind it brings them, but this is because they came to see the second time as a means of receiving that peace. But that peace is theirs in the first baptism, if they will but reflect upon it. Still others, he says, are baptized, sometimes for the third time, to receive the Holy Spirit, but this is because they are conditioned to associate the Spirit with that third time. It is theirs in the first.

He uses the analogies of marriage and naturalization to illustrate the point. At marriage one hardly understands all its blessings, but he need not go back and be married all over again as each new benefit occurs to him. In being naturalized a foreigner may understand that he can now vote, but it may never have occurred to him that he can be *voted for.* Now that he understands he can run for office, he does not have to go back and be renaturalized!

Campbell is especially uneasy over the notion of being baptized again since one did not understand it is "for the remission of sins." Even if one believes he is saved before baptism, it is still his answer of a good conscience toward God, he notes. And to be reimmersed expressly "for the remission of sins" is to assume that baptism is an expiatory rite, that one goes to the laver of baptism much like the Jew went to the altar of sacrifice. "For one who has been baptized into Christ, confessing his faith in the person, character, and mission of Jesus, to be baptized a second time for the remission of sins by itself, or for the Holy Spirit by itself, or for anyone blessing, is without command, precedent, or reason from the New Testament," he concludes.

This is why I use the term *prostitution.* An act can be prostituted as much as a business, a pulpit, or a person. I agree with Campbell. I would not baptize an immersed believer if it were requested of me, for it is against the law to bury live people! If one is not satisfied with his baptism, I would show him that his satisfaction is quite beside the point. He is to believe and obey. Leave the satisfaction to the Lord, for he is the one to be satisfied.

To "satisfy" people, to cause folk "to be sure," or to zero in on some particular promise like the Spirit or remission, is to prostitute a divine ordinance.

The notion that it doesn't hurt anything to be immersed again and again, so "if it would make you feel better, go to it," only aggravates the prostitution, treating something holy as if it were some kind of a talisman to ward off evils or restore peace of mind. Immersion is an act to be obeyed, ordained as such by God. Its antecedent is the one *fact* to be believed, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. That is the way the scriptures cut it, and it is just as well that we leave it that way.

After all, baptism is not as much something that we do as something done to us. It is God's washing, the washing of regeneration, to which we merely yield. Titus 3:5 makes it clear that we are saved "not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy." *Mercy* saves us, not anything that we do, not even baptism. He goes on to show how mercy does it: "by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." The action is God's, not ours. He washes us in the laver of baptism; He renews us in the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit. We but yield to His plan for us.

The thought is the same in 1 Cor. 6:11. After showing that some of them had been thieves, drunkards, and homosexuals, Paul says, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." All these are middle voice rather than active. We don't "get baptized" anymore than we "get sanctified," if these are made to mean any credit at all to ourselves. In baptism God washes us in the cleansing blood of Jesus. He is the baptizer. We are the subjects who have no power whatever to perform "any deed of righteousness" that will save us or help save us. It is strictly by grace through faith, by His mercy.

Once we see immersion in this light, in the light of the Cross, rather than as some expiatory rite akin to the Jewish laver, we will no longer be led to "doubt our baptism" (as if *it* were the big deal!), and we will rather glory in his mercy that washes us. Once we see baptism as the response of faith to God's grace rather than as an absolute and arbitrary command, we will not do such fiendish things as get a girl back in the water because the first time around someone saw an elbow protrude from the watery grave, an incident that has I happened twice that I know of at one of our Christian colleges.

No wonder our opponents have attacked us with such labels as "the Gospel of Water." It has often been all. too true, but it need not be so if we always keep in mind that the glad tidings is always "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). —*the Editor*

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What Kind of a Book is the Bible? …

"IT MEANS WHAT IT SAYS"

One thing we need to get straight about the Bible is that it is a book or many books — that needs to be interpreted. It is hardly the case that "the Bible interprets itself," even though it is true that a close study of the whole helps us to understand a part and that one passage may throw light on another. The old shibboleth that "It means what it says" implies that while others may interpret the scriptures according to party preferences we do not. We just take it for what it says!

This only begs the question. To glibly claim that "It means what it says and says what it means" leaves the question of the real meaning of a passage still open. Just today Ouida and I were reading Eph. 6 together. When we came to verse 18, "Pray at all times in the Spirit," she asked me what that means. Does it help any to say *It means what it says?* She would only need to counter with *Yes, but what does it say?*

Jesus once warned "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mk. 8:15): What does this mean? One would do well to learn something about the use of *leaven* in scripture, and he needs some background information on the Pharisees and Herod. Still he might miss the deeper implications. The scriptures are like a deep well from which we might draw either shallowly or penetratingly, but never exhaustively. A passage like 1 Cor. 4:20, for example, is probably never completely fathomed: "the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power." The best of minds have poured over the Sermon on the Mount all these centuries, or just the Beatitudes, only to concede that the profundity is unfathomable.

There is much of the Bible that quite obviously does not mean what it says, if by that one is referring to a crass literalism. "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and . throwit away," says our Lord in Mt. 5:29. Not many of us go around oneeyed because we believe Jesus "said what he meant and meant what he said." And how about such statements as "Men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 13:29)? Does that mean what it says? Such passages illustrate that the Bible is a book that needs to be taught. Certainly one can make his way through *Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, Revelation,* and difficult portions of the Old Covenant scriptures and learn *something,* perhaps a great deal, on his own. But he does well to have a teacher, There is, after all, a reason why God placed *teachers* in the church. God's community on earth has been studying the scriptures all through the ages, providing for us a great depository of information. It is foolish for us to be indifferent to this.

It amazes me how superficially some of our leaders handle difficult texts, with a kind of "It is clear as day to me; I can't understand why it is a problem to anyone" attitude. An instance of this was in a Bible class I sat in on recently in one of our large congregations, taught by one of the elders. The question concerned the meaning of 1 Cor. 14:22: "Thus, tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers." The problem is that if tongues are for *unbelievers* why would Paul say in the next verse that if an unbeliever comes into the

assembly and finds you speaking in tongues he will suppose that you are mad? If the tongues are for him, then he would be convicted, wouldn't he, instead of not understanding? He goes on to say that prophesy will have such an effect, convicting him. So it looks as if what Paul really means is that tongues are for believers and prophesy (preaching the word) is for unbelievers, even though he says just the opposite.

I explained this to the brother, advising that he read the footnote in Phillips' translation, where he explains that the context forces him to conclude either that Paul's pen slipped or, more likely, a copyist reversed the words. This does solve the problem as to why Paul would say that tongues are for unbelievers and then say the unbeliever will think you mad when he hears them, while saying tongues are *not* for the believer when the whole section shows that they are. So Phillips is saying that Paul must have meant the very opposite, and that the words got screwed up somewhere along the line.

I did not necessarily want the brother to buy what Phillips says, but I did expect him to recognize the problem and to admit the difficulty. This business of "I can't see why its a problem to anybody" in reference to crucial biblical difficulties is irresponsible and unreasonable. It is another way of abusing the scriptures, through oversimplification or simply by ignoring what is clearly a problem. People tire of our equating *our* understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself.

This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given. us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human. Revelation is authoritative because it is the disclosure of the mind of God. Interpretation becomes authoritative only when it commends itself to our conscience. This is what led Thomas Campbell to say in the *Declaration and Address:* "Although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they see the connection, and evidently see that they are so … Therefore no such deductions can be made terms of communion."

You are not necessarily rejecting the authority of God's word when you reject my interpretation of God's word. Thousands of commentaries have been written on the scriptures, a fact that should suggest to us that the Bible is not so simple to understand after all, but not a one of them is authoritative in the sense that we have to accept its conclusions. I am morally obliged to accept only that interpretation that "sells" itself to me as truly reflective of what the scriptures mean.

Communication is communication, whether it comes from man or God. My mother-in-law recently said to me when I was frolicking with her, "You're a monkey!" I took her to mean something like, "I love you when you cut up with me like that, but I'm not going to say it that way." But I *had* to interpret if there was any communication. She did *not* mean

just what she said. So it is with the Bible. If Jesus says of some character, “Go tell that fox …,” I have to interpret if it has any meaning to me. To face this simple fact makes some of our folk insecure, for they want to believe that “We can all understand the Bible alike” and it threatens them that someone else may honestly and responsibly see the scriptures differently from themselves.

There is some unevenness in all this, for we are often quite candid in recognizing legitimate differences in interpretation, while at other times we insist that we are not interpreting at all but “simply taking it for what it says.” We are charitable in those areas that might be dubbed “non-doctrinal,” but very” unyielding with those passages that make us different from others. 1 Thess. 4:4 is a good example. The *King James* has it: “That every one of, you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.” For *vessel* the NEB has *body:* “Each one of you must learn to gain mastery of his body.” The RSV has *wife*, and one might even make it refer to the sex organs. But this does not especially frighten us. The most orthodox Church of Christ elder in teaching a class might well say, “What does this mean to you? How do you interpret it?” and go on to allow open and free discussion.

But he can’t be that way with “our passages,” those that we have long counted on to make us distinctively right. Here he allows for no interpretation, for it is all crystal clear, meaning “just what it says,” and anybody who is honest and wants the truth will see it the way we do, which of course is the only way to see it anyway. That Peter just might be the rock upon which Jesus founded the church (Mt. 16:18), that “buried” in Rom. 6:4 might be taken figuratively, that breaking bread in Acts 20:7 might be an ordinary meal rather than the Supper, that 1 Cor. 16:2 might refer to laying money aside at home rather than into a church treasury — these and many more like them have long since been decided, and there is no reason for further study. No “loyal” teacher among us would dare say, “What is your interpretation?” to such bedrock passages as these. To mildly question what we have always said on such “doctrinal” passages is like turning one’s back on his mother or rejecting apple pie or not standing for the *alma mater* at the high school reunion.

This does not mean that there are no certainties in the scriptures. When it comes to what really counts, *the* Message of the Bible, we can indeed be sure, and here we are not to equivocate. But we can be people of strong conviction, assured of their Lord and their salvation, without being absolutists. We can believe deeply that we are right without arrogantly assuming. that everyone else has to be wrong. —*the Editor*

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HOW TO OVERCOME OUR BIGGEST HANGUP

It amazes me that people can have so much in common in *theory* and yet be so divided in *practice.* An instance of this is that great principle that comes down to us out of our history expressed in that slogan *In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love.* I have not met the brother yet who does not accept this principle: that unity can be based only on matters of faith and that opinions must be held as private property and not be made tests of fellowship. When it comes to putting this into practice we are confronted with what I consider to be our biggest hangup: what I believe to be a matter of faith is viewed by others as a matter of opinion, and what they accept as a matter of faith I relegate to a matter of opinion.

The slogan is not original to our own Movement. It goes back to around 1615, to one Rupert Meldenius, who was defending Lutheranism in the early days of the Reformation, who is quoted as saying in Latin something like this: "If we would but observe unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, charity in both (or all things), our affairs would certainly be in the best possible situation." This was later popularized by Richard Baxter, who urged that all believers follow the dictum: "In fundamentals, unity, in nonfundamentals (or doubtful things) liberty; in all things, charity."

Our forebears in the Restoration Movement, sickened as they were with opinion as the grounds for acceptance into a sect, made this slogan one of the basic principles of their plea. Unity can be realized on the grounds *of the faith* as revealed by the apostles, not upon the suppositions, deductions and opinions of men. Opinions in themselves are all right and even necessary, if men are to study freely, but they have no right to impose any position upon their brothers except what is clearly set forth in the scriptures, was their position.

Alexander Campbell put it this way in *The Christian System,* p. 90: "Let *the Bible* be substituted for all human creeds; *facts* for definitions; *things,* for words; *faith* for speculation; *unity of faith* for unity of opinion; *the positive commandments of God* for human legislation and tradition; *piety* for ceremony; *morality* for partisan zeal; *the practice of religion* for the mere profession of it, and the work is done."

Campbell saw opinions as the basis of creeds, and creeds as the basis of fellowship. He insisted that every creed in the history of Christianity had created a sect. It is ironic that we, heirs of the very Movement he helped to initiate, a Movement "to unite the Christians in all the sects" by replacing faith for opinion as the basis of oneness, should be divided into various parties through the same kind of opinionism and creed-making, Campbell's battle cry, "Human creeds, as bonds of union and communion, are necessarily heretical and schismatical," applies to us as much as to anybody else.

In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love. This is accepted by all our divergent groups, and, I dare say, by the Christian world at large, and yet we remain tragically divided. We have the answer to division *in theory.* It is all wrapped up in that slogan. Our hangup is that we can't move from theory to practice. And this is because we are all fouled up on the meaning of faith and opinion. When someone opposes what we want to practice, we say he is making an opinion a test of fellowship; but when he practices something that we oppose, we say he is violating a matter of faith. It is like one man's definition of *orthodoxy* and *heterodoxy.* "Heterodoxy is *his* doxy and orthodoxy is *my* doxy," he said.

If we think in terms of putting all our conclusions (and practices) into one of two baskets, one marked "matters of faith" and the other "matters of opinion," it will help us see our dilemma. What goes into the "faith" basket is absolutely essential to the Christian religion, while the second basket will receive what we desire or prefer, but they are not of the very essence of our faith. Or to put it another way: what goes into the "faith" basket will be the grounds upon which we accept a man as our brother in Christ; what goes into the "opinion" basket may have some value, more or less, in living the Christian life, but they cannot be made tests of fellowship.

It may also help if we think of these baskets sitting on the Lord's table. Our brethren from all these persuasions are gathered, and each of us is to walk to the table and place his ideas and practices into one of the baskets. Whatever we drop into the "faith" basket will be that which we will require of all the others if they are to be our brothers. What we drop into the "opinion" basket may lay claim to something that we would like for the others to consider, but not something that we would impose on the others as the basis for unity.

We are a diverse group, all of us who are sitting there before the two baskets, but we have one important thing in common. We all look to Jesus as the Lord of our lives and we come from 15 or 20 different parties within the Restoration Movement. We have divided about every decade over the past century over all sorts of things, but now we have gathered to give special testimony as to how significant these differences really are. Here are some of the things that have divided us.

Sunday Schools or Bible classes

Missionary and benevolent societies

Serving the Supper

a. Cups vs. one cup

b. Grape juice vs. wine

Minister system

Charismatic gifts

Premillennialism

"Liberalism"

Instrumental music

Literature instead of or in addition to the Bible

Bible colleges

Order of worship (as stated in Acts 2:42)

Centralized agencies (such as Herald of Truth)

Reimmersion of immersed believers

Open membership

In fundamentals, unity. Are these the fundamentals, the essences of our religion? Are we to say, unless you agree with me on these things and practice what I do, you cannot be my brother and be within the fellowship? If we dare to put these things in the basket of "faith," we are insisting that our position in regards to them is necessary in order to go to heaven.

Here is another list for us to consider:

One body

One Spirit

One hope

One Lord

One faith

One baptism

One God

There is substantial difference between the two lists, for one comes right from the Bible, the other doesn't. Paul lists these seven ones in reference to "preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." They are surely the fundamentals of our faith, for without them fellowship and salvation have no meaning.

We can all with good conscience put these items into the basket of "faith," insisting that if a man does not subscribe to these he is not a Christian. These are all necessary to unity and fellowship. Paul can hardly be criticized for "fellowshipping anybody and everybody," for he bases fellowship upon believing (one faith) in Jesus as the one Lord and yielding to the one baptism, which puts a man into the one Body, by which he receives the one Spirit, shares the one hope, looking to the one God.

We all agree that these go into the basket of "matters of faith," but how about societies, organs, and classes? Come now, do you *really* believe these are in the same class?

Our forebears were well aware of this problem of faith and opinion, and they believed that they came up with an answer. Thomas Campbell put it this way: “In order to be united, nothing ought to be inculcated upon Christians as articles of faith, nor required of them as terms of communion, but what is expressly taught and enjoined upon them in the word of God.”

Why can we not shake ourselves free of this hangup and accept what Campbell is saying? Is instrumental music or acappella music *expressly taught* in the scriptures? Can we take something that the Bible is silent about and put it into the basket of “faith,” thereby declaring it to be essential to salvation? Is a *pro* or *con* position on Herald of Truth in the same category with the seven unities Paul lists in Eph. 4? Is it not really a matter of opinion rather than something *expressly taught* in the Bible?

Opinions and deductions certainly have their place, so we have a basket for them. They are important for study and growth, and they are useful for challenging each other’s thinking. We are only saying, as was Campbell, that they do not belong in “matters of faith.” Hear Thomas Campbell again: “Although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church’s confession.” (*Declaration and Address*, p. 46)

He grants that an opinion or deduction may well be true and thus “the doctrine of God’s holy word,” but since it is not clearly and distinctly set forth as such, it is not immediately evident to all. It cannot, therefore, be binding upon anyone until he himself sees the connection, which, of course, he may never do. Still he is to be received as a brother, for no such deductions are to be made terms of communion.

True, some of us are going to say that the instrument or the Sunday School or a plurality of cups is to us a matter of faith. This can only mean that our deductions, drawn from what little the Bible does say or doesn’t say, leads us to see it a certain way, and to do otherwise would violate our conscience. No one can criticize us for this, for this is what we should do: follow our consciences in view of what we understand the Bible to teach. But still we must grant that this is our own interpretation, and we cannot impose our view upon our brothers, except as they too come to see it as we do. In the meantime we receive them even as Christ received us, to the glory of God (Ro. 15:7).

So this is a lesson in basket weaving. We can overcome a crippling hangup if we will take some of our thinking out of one basket, the one marked “matters of faith,” and put them into the other basket marked “matters of opinion.” Then we weave a basket large enough for the other baskets, marked “love,” and we put everything into it! —*the Editor*

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Notes from Travels in Europe …

MY PILGRIMAGE TO AHOREY

After that grim night in Armagh I was met at my hotel the next morning by Dr. Scott, pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Ahorey, a small village some ten miles from Armagh. It was such a blessing to have Dr. Scott as my host, for he is a longtime resident of the area and is most resourceful on “Campbell country,” which includes Richhill, Market Hill, Hamilton’s Bawn, and Ahorey, the places associated with the life and work of the Campbells. Dr. Scott did his doctorate at King’s College, Dublin, in an area of church history that includes the Ireland of Thomas Campbell’s day, and so he is most alert to the political and economic conditions that led Father Thomas to leave Ireland for America in 1807, to be joined there two years later by his son Alexander and the rest of his family.

I had the advantage of being part of “the Bethany family” that had entertained the Scotts during their visit to Bethany and the States a few years ago. Even though Ouida and I had by then moved from Bethany, the Scotts felt they were returning part of the hospitality tendered them in those picturesque West Virginia hills, and so they did it up right. The lady of the manse prepared a boiled Irish dinner, gracious as it was delicious, and we talked about the Lord, the Campbells, Watergate, the Irish war, and drew comparisons between Ahorey and Bethany. Dr. Scott reminded me that once Father Thomas arrived in western Pennsylvania he likened it to the rolling hills of his native Ireland. As one looks out upon those hills that have inspired many an Irish poet, still almost as untouched as in the early 1800’s, he is reminded of the terrain around Bethany for which Uncle Alex reserved that special adjective *salubrious.*

Mrs. Scott told me with that Irish emphasis that Thomas Campbell was by far her favorite, being the sweet and compassionate soul that he was, and that she had little use for Alexander, whom she saw as austere and unyielding. She yielded just a little when I explained that Alex found himself in the fight of his life on the American frontier where religious bigotry was as fierce as its mountain lions, and that those who would dare had to be undaunting. And she yielded even more when I told of Alex’s tenderness with Selina, when he would miss her about the house only to find her grieving inconsolably at the

newly covered grave of her own little Wycliffe, buried alongside Margaret's children, whom she had also nursed in their illnesses and borne to "God's acre." Easing up behind her, he would whisper those words again and again that she could not quite comprehend, "They are not here, my dear, they are not here." Those men who have to wage the toughest warfare are often the gentlest souls.

Alexander was a boy of about eight or nine when the family moved to Ahorey, and his most impressionable years were those of his father's nine-year ministry with this Seceder Presbyterian Church, which has been a continuing congregation all these years. As I moved up and down the aisle of the old building, still almost identical to the way it was then, I thought of those influences brought to bear upon young Campbell as he grew up in those pews, learning piety and scholarship from his pastoral father and commitment and integrity from his mother.

Dr. Scott and I talked of the time when young Alex sat there as a boy when a troop of Welch horsemen surrounded the place, The captain of the troop supposed he had found a covey of rebels, so, storming into the service, he created a moment of great suspense. As he walked down the aisle, an elder whispered to Pastor Campbell, "Pray, sir, pray!" Whereupon the pastor prayed, including extensive quotes from Ps, 46, until finally the soldier left them in peace.

My host urged me into the pulpit. He said, "Surely you want to stand in Thomas Campbell's pulpit" to my hesitancy to impose myself. I told him I would read once more the psalm that Father Thomas quoted on the occasion referred to. While he occupied one of the pews in quiet dignity, I read the whole of Psa. 46, which begins with "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." Those were uneasy times for the Campbells, and even when they sought peace in a new country, they found their lives continuing in such turbulence that Psa. 46 remained typical of the resource of strength they had to repeatedly call upon.

A bell tower now graces the building, erected by funds raised by American Disciples in memory of Thomas Campbell. A relief bedecks a vestibule wall, honoring him as the church's pastor. A stained glass window, sponsored by the World Convention of Churches of Christ, is in memory of Alexander, "A member of this congregation, who with his Father, pastor of this church, founded the Christian Church in America." It appropriately depicts an open Bible.

Dr. Scott has a little library of Restoration Movement books, and he is well aware of the Movement's significance in the States and elsewhere, and he is proud of the role his church played in it all. He says his members were rather vague about it all when he began his work there 18 years ago, but they have come to have some appreciation of it. He was of great help to me in explaining Father Thomas' involvement in unity efforts while he was

still in Ireland, working as he did for the unity of his own Presbyterian church, which was finally effected some years after he had left for the States. Though he belonged to a strict sect of the Presbyterians that broke away from the state church, he always had an independent mind and a sense of unity of the church.

My host walked me about Richhill, where I mailed a letter to Ouida and saw the building where Thomas and Alexander conducted a school, still in good repair. And I saw the old church where preachers of independent mind proclaimed their views of reformation, including some of the Haldane persuasion (the Campbells probably heard James Haldane at Richhill, the reformer from Scotland) and others of the persuasion that eventually formed the Plymouth Brethren. It was there in Richhill that the synod once met to consider the uniting of the Burgher and Anti-Burgher Presbyterians, something dear to the heart of Thomas Campbell. In his address to them on that occasion he said things about the oneness of the church and the sinfulness of divisions similar to what he later said in the *Declaration and Address* in this country.

We also visited nearby Market Hill where young Alex was in elementary school and where he boarded with a local merchant after his family had moved to a farm near Ahorey. Hamilton's Bawn, the *Bawn* standing for *barn,* is the tiny village where the family lived for awhile, walking to Ahorey two or three miles distance for their meetings.

It was sad to see these peaceful little communities barricaded by troops because of the current religious war, reflecting a condition that has been all too similar all these years, causing anyone, then or now, to think of moving on to a more peaceful land such as ours. It took both vision and fortitude for a self-effacing man like Thomas Campbell to leave country, family and kin and embark upon a dangerous voyage for a new world. He had no way of even imagining what awaited him and his son in the American west.

As long as I was in North Ireland I continued to see a bruised land. Railway terminals bombed out, some having no toilet facilities because of it; a country of fear and uncertainty, wracked by fratricide; a land of ropes and barricades, with travelers few and far between. But I made my way through Dublin to Limerick, to that "Bed and Breakfast" dump that I've told about, and on to Shannon for the flight home. But this was Eire in the south where there are no visible marks of civil strife, and where they have their own money, though they do accept British currency.

Shannon is Eire's claim to progress and prosperity, with lots of business booming in the airport area. A giant Irish Airlines jet bore me to New York in seven hours nonstop. A new brother, Bryan Boss, met me at Kennedy and took me to Ron and Ruann Miller's in Hempstead for a round of meetings for the weekend before Christmas, but amidst all the action it was 3 a. m. by my old European time, and for awhile I didn't know what continent I was on. I spoke on unity at the Mid-Hudson Christian Church on Lord's day and visited with Warren and Norma Van Tuyl, a couple I immersed into Christ almost 30

years ago back in New Jersey while at Princeton. They have hung in all these years, but their little Jennifer, whose picture we have as a baby in Ouida's arms, is no longer all that little. She now sports a law degree and is an assistant D. A.! Life does sometimes bear down on me like that.

The Van Tuyls bore me to LaGaurdia on a pleasant journey of reminiscing, and while I was still trying to put Europe back together I found myself none too soon at the giant D-FW airport, which no one can put together. The next day the family and I took off for our little laughing place on Cedar Creek lake in East Texas, with Mother Pitts, who had stayed with Ouida during my absence, in tow. Before a roaring fire on Christmas Eve I told about "reconciled diversity" in Geneva, our blessed heritage from Scotland, that grim night in North Ireland, and my pilgrimage to Ahorey. And now I've told you. —*the Editor*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Ouida and I visited her old hometown of Athens, Texas some weeks ago, where I addressed the congregation for the first time in 25 years. I was pleased to do this, for Mother Pitts' sake as well as theirs and the Lord's, for my controversial reputation has caused them to be polite but restrained during my scores of visits through the years, even though I was their preacher at age 23. They blessed me more than any Church of Christ ever by giving me Ouida (and Mother Pitts.) It was there I conducted Mr. Pitts' funeral less than a year after our marriage. Well, I was back in the pulpit once more, with no one objecting as far as I know, and I spoke on the believer's hope, dedicating the lesson to the seniors of the congregation, especially to dear old Jack Browning, who has shepherded that congregation for, I suppose, a half century. It was the answer to my prayer. I wanted to speak once more while he and. Mother Pitts were still sitting there. The Lord granted it. Nothing bad happened. No demons came crawling out of the woodwork and no rafters came crashing down. The church is none the worse for it, I think, and, possibly better off. I even received some embraces. If my brethren would just read and listen, and be reasonable and not fearful, they would see that I am not only not an enemy, but among the best friends they have. But the oldest sister there really has my number, no doubt about that. Said she to me afterwards, "Oh, I remember you well. You're the one who would never preach the way we wanted you to!" Should I utter my complaint to the Lord, in a Job-like: lament, as to why I was not born a conformist?

Carl Ketcherside had standing-room only hearing at the Westchester Church of Christ in Los Angeles for four nights, where Harold Thomas labors. One night 50 congregations were represented. The head of religion at Pepperdine thought it not best to invite him to the campus because he is "controversial" (Someone rightly asked if this would leave out Paul and Jesus), so the faculty took it upon itself to issue the invitation. What a tragedy it would be, and how boring, if college kids always had to listen to non-controversial cats.

From the Samsom Avenue Church of Christ in Gadsden, Alabama comes a war bulletin with an article on *Liberalism*. The author and minister once lived in the Dallas area, and I remember him fondly, a good man I would say. I n the article he names as liberals Norman Vincent Peale, Billy Graham, Pat Boone, Ben Franklin (not the one that discovered electricity, I think!) and Leroy Garrett. That is some combination, and I should think that each one would be uncomfortable in being classed with any of the others. Peale and Graham liberals together! That shows how we abuse terms as well as each other. Well, our brother goes on to say that such men are "leading millions into an eternal hell." In writing to this concerned brother I assured him of my love and best wishes, and suggested that he might have overstated his case. That we *liberals* should be leading millions to hell reminds me of Mark Twain's reaction to the news stories of his death. "The news reports of my death have been grossly exaggerated!" he assured the world. This is my first time to be yoked with Peale. That is OK, I suppose, but I'd rather be classed with Paul. I find one appealing and the other appalling!

Dozens in the Church of Christ in Campbell, Ca. read the New Covenant scriptures together during the month of January. Ten pages a day, or about eight chapters, did it. Their impression? "Wow! What a spiritual send-off that was!" What a people we might be if we became inebriated of the scriptures like that, especially if we began each sitting with the prayer, "Holy Spirit of God, teach me as I read."

The bulletin of the Eastside Church of Christ in Farmington, N. M. quotes Harry Emerson Fosdick as saying, "Christians are supposed not merely to endure change, nor even to profit by it, but to cause it."

The Word of Truth, published monthly in Cedar Lake, Indiana, ran an editorial recently in which it affirmed that demons cannot inhabit the believer. "Is Christ a Savior or not?" it asked, and went on to insist that he did "spoil the strong man" and "destroyed the works of the devil," thus securing the believer so' that "the wicked one toucheth him not" (1 Jo. 5:18).

Our non-class brothers have substantial missionary interest in Malawi, Africa, where they operate a school and hospital as well as churches. A recent report reads: "There are now some 200 congregations and 20,000 Christians in this small country." It isn't clear just whom they include in these numbers, but it reads like a broader view of the Christian world in that part of Africa.

Reuel Lemmons, editor of *Firm Foundation,* said in his March 11 editorial: "We constantly plead for more liberty in opinion than many brethren are willing to allow, and we make no apology for it. Conversely, we cannot conscientiously accept the limitless liberty that some brethren advocate. They want liberty to cover not only area of opinion but the realm of faith as well." It would be most helpful if Reuel would be more specific. Does premillennialism or instrumental music fall within the category of the "liberty of opinion" for which he makes no apology for pleading? Unless one can make clear what he means by such a statement, it does little good to make it. For a century now we have drawn the line of fellowship on our Christian Church brothers because of the instrument. Is Reuel saying that this is really a matter of opinion and that we should not do this? If not, what is he referring to that his brethren are not willing. to allow?

There is a group of brethren who are concerning themselves with "spiritual renewal in the Church of Christ" by way of intercessory prayer. The Fellowship of Daniel the Intercessor, 2290 La Vista Rd., N. E. Atlanta, 30329, issues a news letter of reports and causes among our people, inviting the readers to join in prayer. The latest one bore news of spiritual concerns on the part of certain students at ACC.

READERS' EXCHANGE

So many think they can pick up the NT and find in it exactly how everything must be done. Yet in nothing do people want to be told just how they must do everything. They will say, "Nobody is going to tell me just how I must do a thing!" Such a strait jacket would take out all pleasure in doing anything. Isn't it true that "Follow me" is the heart of it all? Some here seem to think that all congregations in the U.S. do things as we do here. I would like to be able to tell them how different a lot of the others are who also call themselves Church of Christ. —*I. H. Grimes, Woodville, Ohio.*

(We regret the passing of this brother at about age 90. His loyalty as a subscriber, friend, and correspondent goes back over 20 years, for he was among our first readers of *Bible Talk.* I was in his home on several occasions, and his sweet reasonableness is a treasured memory. He had read my last communication shortly before his death, and his daughter wrote that it had always meant much to him that I seemed both to understand him and to love him. Ah, think of the masses in our own churches that have to die both unloved and misunderstood! Brother Grimes was a master penman. When he sent me words of

wisdom, beautifully inscribed on cardboard, I would place them on my door at the college. —*Ed*.)

The man I am sending your paper to once thought he'd like to be a "big name" preacher. But after preaching for awhile he found he couldn't play politics. So he works and supports himself and family, and preaches for a congregation in Mississippi which he says is a free, wonderful group. I told him your *Review* is one of the things he needs to encourage him to "hang in" there. —*Virginia Adams, Palos Heights, Illinois*

One of the major problems with us Church of Christ folk is that we do not have vision. There is a vacuum because of no hope. Why look to death? Why not the Lord's return? We should look more to *Revelation*. I saw a film recently on the rapture. Those people, a Church of God, are really looking for His coming and the rapture of believers. They really have hope! Trouble with us is that we are afraid to look at the theology which speaks of His return. It is not a question of premillennialism, but of pro-Israel and the middle East. Why don't you write about that some. *Freedom to look for His return!* How's that for your next article? —*C. O. Istre, Jr., Ph.D., Tulane U. School of Medicine, New Orleans, Louisiana 70112.*

The article about the origin of the "Church of Christ" sure hit the nail on the head. Founders were Peter Warren, Daniel Sommer and David Lipscomb. The place was Sand Creek, Ill. The time: Aug. 17, 1889. We lived for years as neighbors to sister Della Dowdy, who was a daughter of Peter Warren, She was a cultured lady and a fine person. She died several years into her 90's, —*Lowell Rees, Rt. 2, Nixa, Missouri 65714*

I am appreciative of the new series on twisted scriptures. I believe it will be very helpful to many of us. If only we would all attempt to be honest truth-seekers we would make more strides forward. —*Terry Nelson, Oakley, Kansas 67748*

I know you had a wonderful time over in Europe. I would like to take a trip like that sometime. But I run a dairy farm and it is hard for me to get away that long. I hope to see you at the unity forum in Bethany, July 3-4. —*Jennings Buck, Sistersville, W. V.*

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